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Leroy Garrett, Editor

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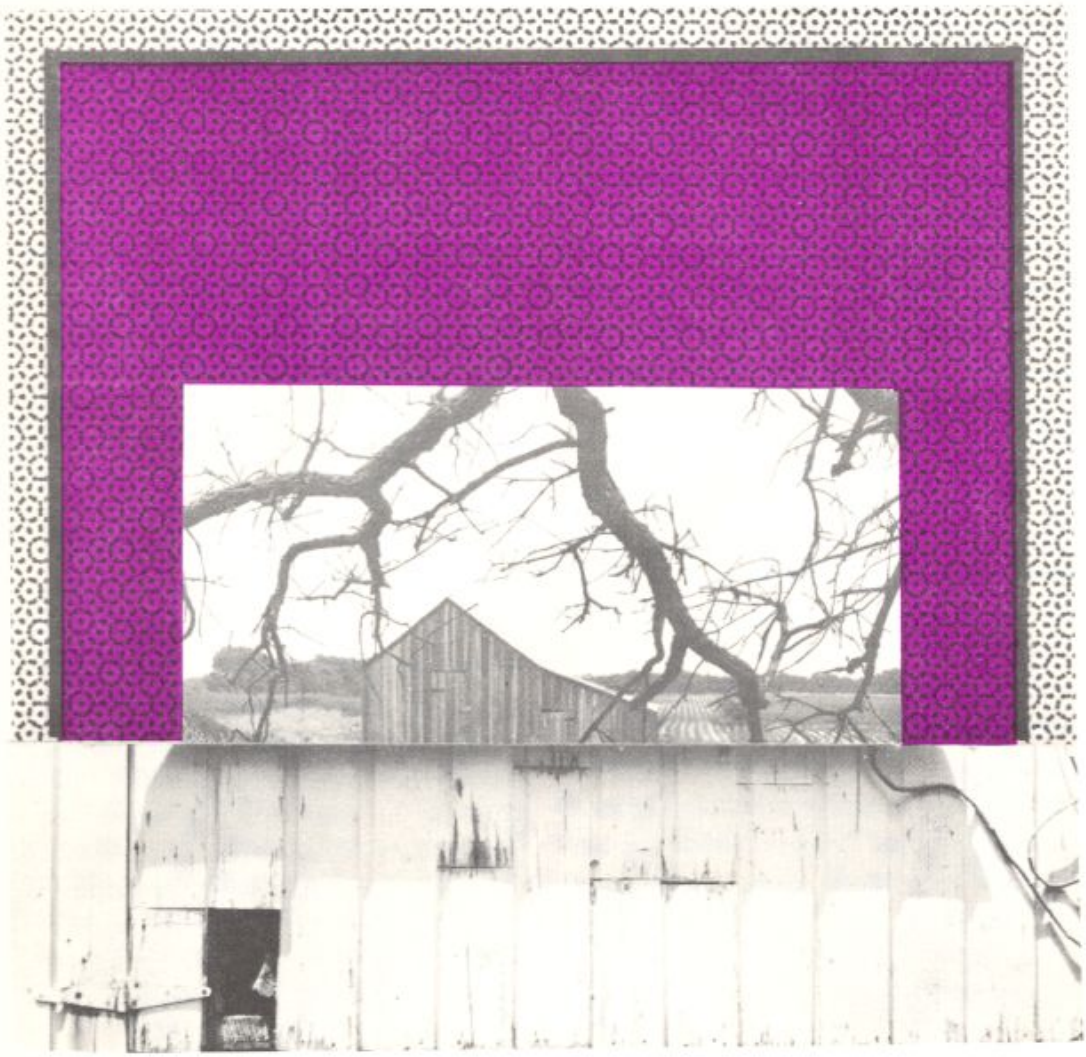

Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands; they will perish but thou remainest; and they will all become old as a garment . . . but Thou art the same and thy years will not come to an end.

Hebrews 1: 10-12

(Photo-collage by Talmage Minter)

Volume 16, No. 2 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **February 1974**

The Church of Christ: Yesterday and Today . . .

THE NATURE OF THE ASSEMBLY

As we think of the meaning of "going to church" or being part of an assembled congregation, we must re-member that God never acts arbitrarily or perfunctorily. All form or ritual that He has instituted not only has deep meaning, but it is ordained for our good. Karl Barth has well said that *God is for man,* and so all that God does is for man's enhancement. God wants us to be happy, mature, and beautiful, and all His work in our behalf is to this end. He does not exact responses from us to see how near we can come to measuring up to His demands. He is both too gracious and too loving to act toward us grudgingly. He wants us for Himself, and like that father going out to meet the prodigal son, He reaches out with an incomprehensible love in hopes of making us whole. The assembly, therefore, must be seen in this light. It is one more expression of His love, one more means of conforming us into the image of His son.

The assembly of the saints is not, therefore, simply a response to some command or the fulfillment of some duty. Almost certainly the primitive church did not assemble because it thought it had to. It was an exciting adventure for them, a fellowship of love, and an experience that they would not consider missing. They did not have to be begged, threatened, or cajoled into attending. And surely they had no such notion of having *done their duty* by gathering with fellow "believers. It was a natural expression of their devotion to Christ and their love for their brothers.

It may sound strange to suggest such in the twentieth century with all our institutional hang-ups, but there is no indication in scripture that the saints gathered to worship. Worship was the whole of their lives. Had you spoken to an early Christian about "going to worship," he would not have known what you were talking about. To them worship was a day and night devotion and dedication to their Lord. Heb. 12:28 says it well: "The kingdom we are given is unshakable; let us therefore give thanks to God, and so worship him as he would be worshipped, with reverence and awe; for our God is a devouring fire." There is no more a connection with the assembly in this passage than there is in Rom. 12:1 which also refers to the worshipful life: "Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart."

There are therefore no acts of worship. It is not something that begins or ends with the sound of an organ or the intonation of a clergyman, No one *leads* or *directs* the worship, unless it would be the God of heaven as He calls us to Jesus through the Gospel. Running errands for a neighbor is as much worship as partaking of the Lord's Supper, or writing a

letter to some lonely soul is as much worship as singing hymns. The apostle seemed to think so at least: “Whatever you are doing, whether you speak or act, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17). We are so hamstrung by our traditions as to be shocked by the suggestion that parents of small children might actually be more worshipful to stay home with the kids on a Sunday or Wednesday night and frolic with them rather than drag them to church still another time. We often frown upon such daring souls, indicating that they have “missed worship.” The truth is that one who “misses worship” to do something merciful such as helping a stranded motorist?) may be rendering a more *acceptable service,* which is what worship means, than if he spent that hour sitting in church.

Come to think of it, where did we ever get the idea that certain perfunctory acts constitute worship? I say perfunctory, for they are usually just that. When we assemble there are those things we always do, apparently because we’ve always done them. We reach for a songbook and begin to sing, and *ipso facto,* just like that, worship has begun. Moments before back in the vestibule we were embracing a dear old sister just recovered from surgery, assuring her of our love and concern. But that wasn’t worship! Now that we are singing we are worshipping, for that is one of the acts that constitute worship. It is high time that we learn better than that sort of folly. Singing is not worship. Giving is not worship. Singing is singing and giving is giving, both of which, like all else we do, are to be to the glory of God. Such acts as breaking bread or reading the scriptures might be referred to as worship (though the Bible never calls them such), but only if talking, eating, sleeping, working, making love, going to school, visiting a neighbor, washing dishes, taking a walk, feeding the dog, and all the rest are called worship.

It is our very selves—our bodies minds, spirits—that are offered to God as a “living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart.” That is the only worship that the scriptures know anything about. There is no reason to believe that what takes place in the assembly fits that standard any more than what happens at work or at school, or in the kitchen, study, or bedroom. There is therefore no necessary connection between the nature of the assembly and worship. In fact, since service gets at the idea of worship as much as any other concept, it might be more scriptural to associate worship with what happens at home or at work, or at the hospital or out on the street. Especially is that the case in our “worship services,” for there is very little service. For the most part we are spectators, It may be very true that a lot of us worship God all too little because of going to church so much. We do all too little serving at church.

Indeed, the one passage that speaks so beautifully about our worship of God is apparently completely divorced from any notion of the assembly: “Through Jesus, then, let us continually offer up to God the sacrifice of praise, that is, the tribute of lips which

acknowledge his name, and never forget to show kindness and to share what you have with others, for such are the sacrifices which God approves" (Heb. 13:15-16). He is not talking about what we do when we go to church, but the attitude and behavior of all of life. Let one praise God as he goes walking or as he drives to work. We "continually" praise God, he says, whether it be when a baby is born or when one of the kids gets married. Or even when the barn burns down or fuel and food prices go up. And notice that if he calls anything worship it is kindness and generosity—"sacrifices" he calls them. These we lay at the altar as much as any "five acts" that we commonly associate with the assembly. The scriptures, of course, know nothing of any "five acts of worship" either in or out of the assembly. We do not assemble to worship, but we assemble as one more expression of "the worship offered by mind and heart."

The Samaritan woman in John 4 had this institutional concept of worship when she said to Jesus: "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the temple where God should be worshipped is in Jerusalem." She has her modern counterpart in those who set aside "the sanctuary" in some church edifices as the place of worship or who define worship in terms of certain prescribed acts. Jesus' answer to the woman reveals that there are no holy places or sanctuaries in the Christian faith apart from the human heart. He speaks of "the real worshippers" as those who worship in *no place,* whether Jerusalem or Samaria, but who worship in spirit and in truth.

To worship in spirit means to serve God in sincere devotion, not out of constraint, law, or tradition. To worship in truth means to honor Him in the great *I Am*, the truth of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This is a call to life in the Son, not a summons to a prescribed order of worship, however "right" it might be.

We can probably speak of "the corporate worship" of the saints without doing violence to the scriptures, though the term itself is not a biblical one. There are those things that the saints are to do together in assembly, and so they are corporate acts. The term worship becomes objectionable when it is used exclusively of certain acts being carried out in certain places rather than the whole of the believer's life. Yet the believer does those things in assembly with other believers that take on a different character because it is the congregated Body of Christ. It is in order to call this corporate worship or service. We all pray privately but prayer in the assembly moves at a different level in that it becomes a corporate function. It was important to Campbell to restore to the assembly what he called "the prayers of the congregation," which is more than someone leading prayer. Singing may not have been congregational, that is, in unison; but it was a part of the purpose of the assembly (1 Cor. 14:26), whether as solos or however, and something different from that singing that more generally filled the believer's life (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16). And there is something special about reading and studying the scriptures as the assembled Body. Rev. 1:3 grants a special blessing to those who read and hear the scriptures in assembly.

There is no scriptural evidence that the pooling or collecting of money was a part of corporate worship, and it is hardly appropriate to the purpose of the assembly, which we shall deal with shortly. Only the Lord's Supper is exclusively related to the assembly. It is the one corporate act that gives special meaning and honor to the gathered Body. We may not be able to prove that the Supper was only on the Lord's day or Sunday, but we can sustain that it was always a corporate act. People who break bread in a wedding ceremony or in mini-meetings apart from the congregation do not act with scriptural precedence. This is not to say that private observance is wrong, but it is to say that the character of the Supper may be misunderstood. The Supper is a community fellowship, a family affair, a meeting of the Body and the Head in intimate communion. But if this makes private observance suspect, it also questions a second serving of the Supper to a handful of the congregation at a later hour, which is an anomaly in the modern Church of Christ.

The Supper is a community's memorial and proclamation, not a sacrament or some efficacious means of grace. One has not missed some special personal blessings if he is unavoidedly absent from the assembly, and so he doesn't have to "get his" later. It is the Body that breaks bread as a memorial, so if a member has to be absent from the assembly he is excused. If he sees the Supper as a sacrament (that which in itself is a means of grace), then let him observe it at home or at work or in his car. If a congregation must have a second serving, then the entire congregation should again break bread.

If the nature of the assembly is not, then, to perform certain acts of worship, what is its nature? The apostle is clear enough on this point: "All of these must aim at one thing: to build up the church" (1 Cor.14:26). He is speaking of mutual sharing in song, teaching, and ecstatic utterance. Throughout 1 Cor. 14 he describes the assembly as an experience in edifying and encouraging one another. In verse 3. "When a man prophesies, he is talking to men, and words have power to build; they stimulate and they encourage," and in the next verse he places prophecy over tongues because it has the power "to build, to stimulate, and to encourage." In verse 12: "You are, I know, eager for gifts of the Spirit, then aspire above all to excel in those which build up the church," and in verse 19 he says he chooses to speak plainly rather than in a tongue "for the benefit of others as well as myself." That phrase well summarizes the nature of the assembly. Then in verse 31 he calls for order in mutual sharing "so that the whole congregation may receive instruction and encouragement."

I would settle for those last words from Paul as the purpose of the assembly: *that the whole congregation may have instruction and encouragement.* We do not assemble to worship or to perform acts of devotion. We shut ourselves off from the evil world for a few precious hours so as to be with Jesus and his Body in assembly in order to be built up in the holy faith, encouraged to be faithful to our call, and instructed in the scriptures.

While the Supper was always observed in assembly, it is probable that there were assemblies without the Supper. Their purpose was to encourage and build up one another. As Heb. 10:24-25 puts it: “We ought to see how each of us may best arouse others to love and active goodness, not staying away from our meetings, as some do, but rather encouraging one another, all the more because you see the Day drawing near.” Heb. 3:13 puts, it “Day by day, while that word ‘Today’ still sounds in your ears, encourage one another, so that no one of you is made stubborn by the wiles of sin.”

Mutual edification is the substantial principle in Paul’s epistles, finding application to the whole of the believer’s life in and out of the assembly. Rom. 12:4 is an example: “Just as in a single body there are many limbs and organs, all with different functions, so all of us, united with Christ, form one body, serving individually as limbs and organs to one another,” and he goes on to show that the purpose of our several gifts is for mutual up building. The grand principle is underscored in Eph. 4:16: “He is the head and on him the whole body depends. Bonded and knit together by every constituent joint, the whole frame grows through the due activity of each part, and builds itself up in love.”

All this makes it evident that the Body is not only to assemble, but that in its assemblies it is to build itself up in love through mutual sharing. We are without scriptural authority when we split the assembly into one speaker and a silent body of listeners. We are also missing the mark when we seek to transform a meeting place into “the sanctuary” and thus achieve “an atmosphere conductive to worship.” And so we have come to equate silence with reverence, thus circumventing that spontaneous ministry that builds, encourages, and informs. It is an atmosphere conducive to “the fellowship of the Spirit,” the sharing of the common life in Jesus, that we must seek to achieve. This is the nature of the assembly.—*The Editor*

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Notes from a Travel Diary . . .

FORUMS EAST AND WEST

Over the holidays it was my good fortune to attend special gatherings in Hartford, Illinois and Abilene, Texas. These were both unity forums in that brethren who are normally “out of fellowship” with each other were brought together in sharing sessions. The Hartford Forum in Illinois has been well named, for it has for nearly two decades been a *forum* for almost every issue of any significance within our Movement. It has probably been the freest of all such gatherings, with complete liberty to discuss everything from evolution and inspiration to inter-racial marriage and glossolalia, and before an audience

that is made to feel more like participants than spectators. Small churches have had an important role in religious freedom throughout history, all the way from the persecuted band of saints in Macedonia to the seminal groups at Cane Ridge and Brush Run. The little Hartford congregation joins that glorious cloud of witnesses.

When the Preachers' Workshop began in Abilene in 1970 those responsible made a point of disassociating it from the college. ACC was not the sponsor, but only provided the context, we were assured. This was in case the thing exploded in their faces, which it could well have done. In four years they have learned that our folk are not only ready for this sort of thing, but are eager for exchanges across lines and at a controversial level. Now the college is the willing sponsor of the event, which this year became the Preachers-Elders Workshop, attracting about 650, with 80 or so being elders. Since there were about that many present last year in the face of a fierce ice storm, one would have expected upwards of twice that number this year with the weather like spring. The issues discussed this time were probably not as lively and momentous as last year.

There were upwards of 200 present for the Hartford gathering, which met at a motel with facilities that accommodated sharing session for all those present, and with Carl Ketcherside presiding, who is probably at his best in such give-and-take exchanges, they alone were worth all the time and trouble. I am still old-fashioned enough to enjoy hearing my brothers and sisters talk about what they think, whether they be housewives, teachers, apple growers, or factory workers. If movements do not reach the grass-roots level they'll never make it. Hartford gatherings are always down-home enough that everyone present feels like he's somebody. And yet the sessions are about as sophisticated and daring as any. This year we talked about everything from cultural influences upon church life and the inerrancy of the Word to the nature of baptism and the professional ministry. We even had a woman join a brother in discussing the role of women! My assignment was to examine the system of hiring a man to serve as the minister of a church, but I was embarrassed that the brother who shared the assignment with me was much of the same persuasion, albeit much more severe, in his pronouncements against the system. Such a controversial issue should not have been so one-sided. That was also true at Abilene in an instance or two. My experiences through the years in discussing the pastor system have been so stormy that I would never have supposed that I would ever have shared the platform under such circumstances that my position would have been in the majority. Maybe I had better reexamine my position! My essay is published in the last issue of this journal.

Between Hartford and Abilene I sandwiched a New Year's Eve celebration with friends in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Earl Edwards in Tulsa, a pleasure I have now had three years in a row, having Ouida and the kids with me one of those times. This was a typical mini-meeting in which we shared together, especially in terms of counting our blessings and counting what God has done in our lives, which allows the sisters to have their say, which

of course nearly always outdates what the men say. We saw the New Year in by a study of the Word, drawn from some of our Lord's experiences with the outcasts of society.

As charming as Earl and Dot Edwards are, making a reject like me feel like a king in their home, the person who stands out in my mind on that trip is a young Tulsa attorney I sat by on my flight from St. Louis, experiences that might well be arranged in heaven. We talked about the problem of legal training, motivated by my question as to whether he agreed with Chief Justice Burger's complaint that lawyers today are not well enough qualified for the ordeals of a court-room trial. At this he told of his years in law school, recounting what he now sees to be weak spots in his training. "Too much theory and not enough of the practical," he said. His teachers rarely had courtroom experience themselves, and he felt a need to sit with men who were out where the action is. He opened his heart in reference to his own inadequacies, fearing that his clients get less than what they need. We then talked about the training of the clergy and made some comparisons, which gave me an opportunity to say a word for the priesthood of all believers.

I suggested that with his legal background he should be in a good position to appreciate the fact that our relationship to God is based upon grace rather than law. I pictured all this in terms of a courtroom scene with God as judge and Satan, old *diabolos,* as "the accuser" or the prosecuting attorney. He and I are sitting there as the accused, with Satan stating his case against us—and I readily granted that I would have no chance in the face of all the evidence Satan would present. In terms of law my case is hopeless and my doom is sealed. But Jesus as my advocate steps before the judge, not to argue in terms of law, but to take my own guilt upon himself. "Leroy is guilty," says Jesus to the judge, who is his Father, a fact that makes all the difference, "but I take his sins upon myself." The judge, because of Jesus, declares me "not guilty," which is what *righteousness* means. Because I believe in Jesus and respond to his love God makes me right as I stand before him. I pass from judgment into life. I am saved by his grace.

The young lawyer was giving me such attention as I rarely have, whether in a classroom or a livingroom, and it was obvious that he wanted to hear more. So I applied all that I had said to the woman that Jesus talked to at Jacob's well, recounting the incident fact by fact, showing that her hope lay not in any law, whether the Jewish or the Samaritan, but in the "living water" that only Jesus could give. She was one of the outcasts of society, a woman with a checkered background who probably came the distance to Jacob's well in order to escape the taunts of the "righteous" women at wells nearer her home. And she walked right into history, into the world's greatest book, and into the presence of the Son of God, all because of God's grace. The story reveals how Jesus broke down the walls that separate people: the barrier between races, between male and female, between the righteous and the unrighteous. In him is the love and the light that makes men one.

The jurist was obviously impressed with the Man of Galilee, who, I believe, he saw in a different light. I am left with some way out thinking about things like that, that perhaps God in His goodness sends folk around here and there so that contacts like that are made, and these incidents may be more important for His purposes than the reasons we have for a trip to start with.

I might mention that due to waiting over at Hartford for two days, in view of the Tulsa engagement, I got caught in a 14-inch snow storm, the worst in many years. It was romantic sitting there in Berdell and Dorothy McCann's livingroom watching the snow pile up. Nature really puts on a good show if we just pause long enough to watch. Even when they announced that Lambert Field in St. Louis was closed, with no planes flying in or out, I was heartened to realize that man with all his ambitious technology, including giant jets of the air, have to wait and give place to nature now and again.

But the McCanns and I got in a trip to Nebo, Illinois before the snow began. Berdell wanted me to visit with his aged parents who were among the charter members of the Hartford church, but who have now returned to their humble home in Nebo. Mr. McCann hears with difficulty, so I was pleased to sit by him and express my love and appreciation for his long and good life with shouts of glory. It was such a sweet experience being with such dear old saints, a taste of that tender fellowship that will be ours in heaven, I'd say. It is sinful of us to neglect the aged. Jesus wouldn't and didn't (and doesn't), that's for sure.

An interesting aside to the Nebo trip was the old church building that Berdell pointed out to me as a place where Carl Ketcherside often spoke as a boy preacher, beginning when he was barely 13. How beautiful it is that one can give virtually his entire life in service to the Lord. Like Samuel, he was taken to the temple early. Old-timers in those parts like to tell how people would flock in to hear Carl, as much out of curiosity of hearing a boy wonder as anything else, and of how Carl would sometime immerse men twice his size with understandable awkwardness.

Speaking of Carl, while I waited for the plows to clear the snow from the airport runways, I settled down to read one of his old debates on the college question, a book just given me by Berdell, The *Ketcherside-Porter Debate.* I became especially intrigued with one historical reference that reaches on back to the pioneers. Porter made the point that old Daniel Sommer, the father of the anti-college movement, had changed his position and now stood with Porter and the college advocates. Carl, then only 28, tells of his relationship with Sommer, relating how the old man laid a hand on his shoulder, commissioning him to take his place as the leader in the brotherhood when he passed on. He says that Sommer had told him that when he was Carl's age old Benjamin Franklin had in like manner deputized him to carry on after his departure. That sort of reaches back, doesn't it?

I remember seeing the old warrior as a very old man when I was but a youth at Freed-Hardeman. Brother Hardeman was courting him and making the most of his change on the college question, which was probably more of a modification of position, especially in terms of fellowship, than a complete reversal. In his inimitable way he would begin his remarks with a solemn, sonorous "Disciples of the Savior . . ." folding his Bible under his right hand drawn to his breast, standing tall and dignified. For weeks after that we boys in the dorm would compete in mocking him, seeing who could best imitate his canonical "Disciples of the Savior." I was in the presence of greatness and knew it not. And had I any idea that he was part of an apostolic succession of sorts, having been blessed by old Ben Franklin himself, a pioneer I would later come to admire so much, and the blesser of Carl Ketcherside, whom I had not yet even heard of but who would one day be both friend and co-worker, I would have shown more reverence toward the whole thing,

But in this debate Porter pressed the point of Sommer's change, the man who had taught Carl all he knew on the college issue. Carl countered by saying he was like Lincoln in that he would stand by a man only so long as he was right, and since Sommer was no longer right he would have to separate from him. "When he espoused the position, by his actions if not by his words, that this man occupies tonight, I had to break the bond between us because my Book says, 'If any man bring not this doctrine, bid him not Godspeed;" he said, drawing the line of fellowship on his old colleague and using 2 John 9 to justify it! While I got a good laugh out of that, I paused to marvel at how God has lifted Carl from the throes of partyism to make him a leader in a movement to restore love, unity and fellowship to our divided ranks. Why do some men make such changes and others don't? It looks as if maybe Sommer in his latter years was seeking for peace with his brethren that his party was hardly ready for.

And I was led to muse upon what we have done to 2 John 9-10 all these years, and what we have allowed that interpretation to do to us. One wonders how the notion ever got started, that we can't invite a brother into our home and thank God for him if he differs with us on cups, classes, colleges, organs, organizations, or the millennium. Or that we'd have to turn from our door the likes of Keith Miller or Francis Schaeffer. It is complete idiocy. I think of the end of Paul's list of *real* sins in Ro. 1:30 (Jer. Bible): "without brains, honour, love or pity." I am compelled to follow Barclay's interpretation that John is giving an emergency injunction so as to stave off the influence of the Gnostics, who were well nigh in a position to destroy the church.

The trip to Abilene had an added dimension this time in that *Fellowship,* the magazine published jointly by concerned ones from the Disciples, Christian Church, and Churches of Christ, were to have a luncheon meeting in conjunction with the Workshop. We scheduled it so as not to interfere with the program and at a motel near the campus. We arranged for John Allen Chalk, former minister of the Highland Church of Christ in

Abilene and now an attorney in that city, and Frank Cunningham, pastor of the Central Christian Church in Ft. Worth, to be the speakers. This meeting brought a number of Disciples and Christian Church leaders to Abilene, including Bob Shaw, pastor, First Christian Church, Miami; Ken Johnston, Milligan College; Jim Smith, director of Christian Missionary Fellowship; LeRoy Lawson, minister of East 38th St. Christian Church, Indianapolis and chairman of *Fellowship;* and Bob Mulkey, one of the editors of *Fellowship,* Salem, Oregon.

I was eager that these men be well received, for they had arranged similar meetings at the Disciples convention in Cincinnati and the Christian Church convention in Indianapolis. But I was fearful the luncheon might fall on its face, for I was about the only one in the group that was acquainted well enough to issue invitations. The ACC officials wanted no announcements made (which I understand), so it was a matter of passing the word to some folk that I thought would be interested. I was a bit discouraged by the prospects the night before, so, tired worrying about it, I simply turned it over to the Lord, asking that he get together whomever he pleased, few or many. I supposed it would be few, the limitations being what they were, so I told the motel folk to prepare for 50, possible 75, and yet I could hardly see where the 50 would come from. The Lord had a different idea about it, for 200 showed up!

It was a moving spiritual experience. John Allen gave a personal account of his pilgrimage in recent years, including a summary of his conversations with his parents and grandparents, who were disturbed by his change of direction. And he related beautifully to his audience, which included folk as far in one direction as Buster Dobbs of Houston and as far the other way as Vic Hunter, editor of *Mission.* He loved them all and accepted them all as his brothers. Frank Cunningham was also powerful, pointing out that it is the gospel that makes us one amidst diversity of opinions. He really rang true to the Word, making it clear to those present that at least some Disciples still accept the authority of the Bible as much as anyone else.

The Lord really did it up right, for we not only had a tremendous meeting, but the Abilene *Reporter-News* covered it and gave us a two-column spread in its next issue, with picture and all! But I marvel at Satan's craftiness, for he always manages to sow tares. The reporter gave us a splendid writeup, but quoted Harry Cunningham as saying that differences on baptism do not matter and that we can be one anyway. To the contrary, Harry was true blue in pointing to faith and baptism as the basis of fellowship, even referring to Walter Scott's five steps, "which I cut my teeth on," as he put it. I surmise that the reporter saw that Harry was trying to conciliate, and what has been more controversial than baptism? I am not saying that people might not differ on baptism and still be one, but only that Harry did not say that, and I would not want him to say that, not at Abilene. My

first concern is restoring fellowship among those who are already immersed into Christ. If *we* can't be one, there is little reason to be concerned with Methodists and Presbyterians.

I would say that *the issue* at the Workshop was a negative one, *liberalism,* with the reactionaries in the ascendancy in terms of those on the program. The audience as a whole would be far more free and open than the participants. Liberalism is made to refer to the new look, the new direction, the new emphasis, or as one speaker put it "an effort to restructure the church."

The two evening sessions were turned into vigorous attacks on *Mission,* which stands virtually alone as *the* liberal journal among us. Glen Wallace was ill and could not read his paper on "Liberalism in the Church," but Buster Dobbs was an appropriate substitute. The paper charged that *Mission* was a calculated and determined effort to sell out the church. In doing this it teaches evolution, abortion, speaking in tongues, and subjectivism; and it denies the inspiration of the scriptures and the oneness of the church. It also criticizes the pioneers, a charge that boomeranged on Buster Dobbs, for on that evening only one pioneer was quoted (David Lipscomb), and that was by F. L. Lemley, the only "liberal" on that session, to the effect that we have brothers who are in error and that we should bear with one another in our differences. Buster came back and accused F. L. of trying to prove something from the pioneers! The point was that Lipscomb sounded for the world like the quotes from *Mission* and other "liberals," so F. L. wanted to know if Lipscomb was a "liberal," especially since Buster seemed to have such a respect for the pioneers.

There were a few eggs laid along the way, and at this point I will call no names except that of Vic Hunter, editor of *Mission,* who read an excellent paper on "Responsible Christian Journalism." He did not even refer to *Mission,* but his respondents had not come to respond to the principles he laid out for examination, but to attack him, his magazine, and his board. President Stevens, who presided, should not have allowed it, but it went on and on and on, *Mission* being depicted as trying to do what the respondent supposed earlier journals had done to lead the church astray in former times. But Vic handled the situation with a maturity far beyond his years, observing that the participants had left the issue under discussion and had turned it into a heresy hunt.

The most interesting point to me in Reuel Lemmons' presentation on "Brotherhood Politics" was that his judgments were concerned more with attacks from the *right* (Ira Rice, Jr. and the like?) than from the left, which appeared to make him less critical of *Mission* than previous speakers. And he admitted that if he had to go to hell, he had soon go left as right. Nor does he mind the criticism that he speaks out of both sides of his mouth. After all, you have to do that, he observed, if you are speaking to those on your right and then to those on your left, and he talks to both! I both like and enjoy Reuel so much that I cannot easily criticize him, but I was left with the feeling that he did not allow sufficient room for free, vigorous criticism of our leaders and institutions. He called for loyalty to

institutions like ACC, not criticism. And so with the church. I would rather say that one might show his loyalty by criticizing. ACC and like institutions need more criticism, not less, which is true of all leaders and agencies.

But even more important was Reuel's observation that we are sectarians when we impose our personal interpretations upon others and make them a test of fellowship. I wanted to ask from the floor if an example of that would be one's view on instrumental music, the millennium, Sunday School, or Herald of Truth, but could not. Afterwards in a small circle he answered to the effect that the problem is distinguishing between matters of faith and opinion. He readily agreed that what is faith to one is opinion to another, and it is this problem that we are going to have to work on in reaching out in fellowship.

I was eager to see the reactions of the Disciples and the Christian Church fellows. They were amazed that there could be such a "shoot out" between preachers in such good spirit. Bob Shaw, who has long struggled with the restructure question among Disciples, said that there would now be better understanding among his associates if there could have been such openness and frankness in their exchanges. They were also impressed that *Mission*, one little magazine with a modest circulation, could so arouse the leaders of an entire brotherhood. They thought that said a great deal as to how tight things have been with us all these years.

One of them was shocked that the instrumental music thing should be such a big deal, and it was referred to again and again by way of illustration. *Why is this such a hang up?*, he asked me. It seemed to him that we acted as if it were included in some of those lists of ugly sins in scripture, such as adultery, murder, and witchcraft. How can it be so important when the scriptures say nothing about it either way? I may not have satisfied him in explaining that it reflects a certain disposition toward the silence of the scriptures, and that this in turn is related to the authority of the scriptures. He was hardly ready to accept the conclusion that he did not believe in the authority of the scriptures because he elected to use an organ. It is a matter of interpreting silence in different ways, I told him.

These fellows were astute in seeing those nuances that would normally be known only to those of us "raised in the faith." When a speaker from the floor raised the issue of ACC faculty being on the board of *Mission*, one of these fellows leaned over and asked me, "What difference does it make whether they are on the board if ACC is not the church?" And when one of the speakers quoted Elton Trueblood so warmly and approvingly, one of them whispered: "Is Elton Trueblood a Christian?" And when Hunter's respondents turned on him rather than the issue, they complained with "As chairman, Stevens should call a point of order!" Above all, they were gratified to be so warmly received. Several of them said it was one of the greatest experiences of their lives. And the sprawling ACC campus with all its facilities impressed them. They also identified with Landon Saunders, who was the banquet speaker. Landon identified "the irreducible minimum" of the Christian

message as the proclamation that Jesus is Lord, as set forth in *Acts*, and response to him in faith and baptism. These fellows thought that to be the key to restoring fellowship between us all.

That is a good place to bring this to a close. Yes, what is the *irreducible minimum* of fellowship? Is it more than what it takes to be saved? Since Landon said nothing about organs and societies and the like, they took it that we can all be one on the ground that we have alike accepted Jesus as Lord and together we have been baptized into him. If we expand the minimum to include other things, we open the gate to partyism, to which there is no end.—*the Editor*

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EXORCISING THE EXORCIST

It will not be argued, I suppose, that one has to personally witness *The Exorcist* in order to offer some evaluation. A physician does not have to suffer from cancer in order to deal with it, nor does one have to visit the houses of ill repute so as to qualify as a judge about such behavior. I have not seen nor do I plan to see the movie in question, nor will I be reading the book of the same title. My 14-year old Ben insisted that I take him to see it, especially after all the ballyhoo about it, but I categorically refused. To his insistent *why,* I explained that I loved him too much.

Of all the descriptions of the movie and the crowds that it attracts, the most tragic of all are the accounts of children being taken to see it by grownups. How can a parent or any adult be so irresponsible as to subject a child to scenes that cause men to faint and women to vomit? *The National Observer* says, "*The Exorcist* may be the first film ever to give audiences pre-performance jitters, mid-performance fear and trembling, and post-performance nightmares." Some way to bring kids up in the fear and admonition of the Lord!

In 24 theatres across the land the movie is reducing people to "fainting spells, nausea, and something approaching catatonia." They use smelling salts in San Francisco, where as many as ten people pass out in the lobby after seeing the show. Some leave the theatre screaming, others in disgust. The scenes are described as repulsive, the language trashy, and the plot frightening. The 12-year old girl, whose demon is being exorcised, under-goes a spinal tap and arteriography that causes her to spew pea-green vomit on the two priests attending her, while her head is turned completely around. She masturbates with a bloody crucifix and utters filthy language. Referring to Bruce Cook's book, the basis of the movie, one observer says, "What was obscure in black and white on the printed page is now obscene in glorious color on the silver screen."

It is too bad that TV has in recent years funneled so much obscenity into our living rooms that we seem incapable of exposing such movies as these for what they are: *sheer trash and filth.* Once upon a time we were a people rather critical of the movie industry, and our preachers had a lot to say about "the menace of the movies." TV has changed all that. I heard Art Linkletter talk about how filthy the *Godfather* was, and yet it grossed 105 million. The Exorcist may do even better. In Washington, D.C. they fill the theatre and still turn away 500 a night, and in most other cities the enthusiasts are lined up for blocks in hopes of getting a seat. It is hardly an effort to think on "all that is true, all that is noble, and that is just and pure, all that is lovable and gracious, whatever is excellent and admirable" (Phil. 4:8). Suppose Jesus has any disciples in those lines, awaiting their baptism in vomit, gore, filth and horror? Let them go rather to a hospital or a rest home and hold the hand of a sick or lonesome one.

The greatest damage that such a film may do, however, is not its format of super trash, but its depiction of what is associated with Satan. While the movie is sufficiently evil, it is misleading to conclude that Satan takes *that* form in people's lives. Satan's most effective agency may well be in the office, the home, and even in the pulpit, and not as much in innocent children as in healthy, affluent (or poor), busy adults. And Satan may do his thing in a mind behind a handsome face as well as one torn and clawed in the mental anguish of "demonic possession." The deceiver wants more than blood and guts in his trove. He chooses rather to reap hate, jealousy, pride, arrogance, faction, and the like. And of course lying, stealing, and adultery are still old-fashioned favorites of his. A liar, a fornicator, or one who beats his debts may well watch *The Exorcist* with horror, supposing that *that* is Satan all right, and he plans to have no part of him. They walk out, taking Satan along with them in their hearts, hoping that no evil spirit ever gets hold of them as it did that poor little girl!

The scriptures warn us of Satan's craftiness, for he has as many wiles as a dog has fleas. A favorite wile is to liken himself to an angel of light or a minister of righteousness. He is too subtle and charming to scare the wits out of people. He had rather lure them into unfair competition or social injustice, and then supply the rationalizations that go along with it. He doesn't want people to faint and puke. He had rather that they stand at the altar, well and happy, and thank God that they are not like sinful people. Ah, the deceiver knows his way around. Some business man who double-crosses a partner and cheats on his wife (as well as on his tax return) goes to see *The Exorcist*, and yanks the cover over his head that night in hopes that no demonic spirit invades his serenity.

Another misconception of the movie is its implication that Satan can take control of one's life with or without one's willingness. The movie has him dwelling in a child, contorting and distorting both mind and body, and maintaining such power until exorcised by the attending priests. The viewer is led to suppose that such might happen to him, that

Satan at any moment may overpower him, capturing all his faculties, and refusing to turn loose except by some special magic.

This is almost certainly completely false. Satan has no control over one's life except as that person willingly yields himself to his clutches. Paul puts it this way; "You know well enough that if you put yourselves at the disposal of a master, to obey him, you are slaves of the master whom you obey; and this is true whether you serve sin, with death as its result; or obedience, with righteousness as its result" (Ro. 6:16). And Jas. 4:7 assures us: "Stand up to the devil and he will turn and run."

It is true that in the time of Jesus the demonic spirits seemed to have invaded people (and even swine) apart from their will, and this included children. Jesus on occasion drove such demons from people. These demons recognized Jesus, not only calling him by name but complaining that he had come to trouble them before they were ready. And he did just that. "On that cross he discarded the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment; he made a public spectacle of them and led them as captives in his triumphal procession" (Col. 2:15). This does not mean that Satanic power has all been destroyed, though Jesus will one day do that, but that Jesus had taken command in the universe. His death and resurrection make a big difference as to the influence Satan can have in the human heart. If he gains a soul, it must be by winning the person's will, and he cannot arbitrarily take over one's life. All Satan's servants are *willing* servants. They can escape his mastery if they really want to.

I had barely heard of *The Exorcist* when one of my former students, a bright young married woman with a young son, called me to ask me my opinion of it. It had disturbed her to the point that she feared Satan might impose himself in her life, bruising and battering both mind and body as he did the child in the movie. She described the picture as corrupt and disgusting, and she said she would discourage anyone from seeing it. It had left her frightened, anxious about whether she might at any moment meet such a fate as "the possessed one" in the story.

Knowing that she had faith in Jesus, I proceeded to see if I could not "exorcise" *The Exorcist* by an appeal to him whom God made both Lord and Christ. "He is himself our peace," I assured her, and there is nothing that can separate us from his love, whether "in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths—nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus is "an anchor for our lives, an anchor safe and sure." And that anchor will hold against any attack Satan may make.

I assured her that she need have but one concern: enthrone Jesus always as the Lord of her life. If he is there, dwelling within us through his Spirit, we need have no fear of Satan and all his angels. I told her that I believed in a spirit world that is evil as well as good, and

that the scriptures teach the reality of Satan, and that he is our enemy of whom we are to be aware. But if we have Jesus he has no power over us. The anchor will hold fast and sure in every storm, for faith is always our victory. And no person is *compelled* to entertain Satan in his life. He may come barging in, yes, but only when we wilfully open the door, succumbing to his enticement.

Well, I think I "exorcised" *The Exorcist.* She felt she had been delivered from its outrage, and that she could now sleep in the peace of Christ rather than in fear that a demon would come through the keyhole and do her in.

Now, are *you* going to see *The Exorcist?* May I urge you to stay home and read the scriptures with your family instead, or walk across the street and visit a widowed neighbor. One of Satan's wiles is to work upon people's curiosity. They line up for blocks to see this movie because they're curious, the producers say. If they have heard or read about it and still want to see it, then it has to be a *morbid* curiosity. Jesus calls us to a life that far transcends such carnality.—*the Editor*

In the long, fierce struggle for freedom of opinion, the press, like the Church, counted its martyrs by thousands.—*James A. Garfield*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

The Christian Appeal, published by our non-class brethren at 4220 W. 11th Ave., Amarillo, Tx. 79106, filled its January issue with morning and evening prayers for the sick in the hospital. They reflect a deep sensitivity for the suffering and confidence in divine help. Subs are 2.50 per year.

The Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston is cooperating with the Spring Branch Christian Church in a unique hospital ministry. They maintain four apartments for families who come to Houston to be with their sick. In recent months 26 families have been assisted, representing a savings of $45,000 for them. Besides the good done, the Bering folk see this as "a very positive step in the direction of Christian unification."

Michael Hall, writing recently in the bulletin of the Northland Church of Christ, 4581 Cleveland Ave., Columbus, Ohio 43229, observes that confession is a continuing experience of the believer rather than a "step" in a plan of salvation. The scriptures on

confession relate to the life of a Christian, not to one who has not yet obeyed. The eunuch in Acts 8, brother Hall says, stated that he believed, to be sure, for the evangelist needed to know, but this was not a confession. His confession (or profession) began when he was immersed and continued all his life. He notes that no one in any of the cases of conversion was told to confess. The confession is the believer's charge to "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Heb. 10:23).

The bulletin of the University Church of Christ, 336 N. Guadalupe, San Marcos, Tx. 78666, quotes Homer Hailey, retired teacher of Florida College, to the effect that the church's greatest need today is for those who will talk to people about their souls. "Little of the burning passion for men's souls as seen in Jesus and the early Christians is to be found among Christians today," he says.

Rhoderick D. Ice, writing recently in *Christian Standard*, says that "non-instrument" brethren and the "independent" brethren have more in common than they have differences. He believes the two groups would not be united even if the instrument question were settled. Why? The culprit is "just plain prejudice (on both sides)." He quotes David Lipscomb's comments on Eph. 4:3 to show that it is God that makes us one, not some negotiation of our own. "All *in* Christ are one *with* Him and *in* Him. Nothing can keep two persons in Christ separated. They will flow together," say Uncle Dave.

Writing in the first issue of the new *The Disciple*, Howard Short, former editor of the journal but now only a writer, points to the difficulty of taking the Bible literally, referring in particular to the instance of Jesus' washing feet and instructing his followers to do likewise. "Numerous Disciples of Christ claim to take the Bible literally. More members of the 'undenominational fellowship of Christian Churches and Churches of Christ do. And the non-instrumental churches of Christ practically all claim to do so. None of us washes feet as a religious ceremony. I've heard preachers in my childhood laugh and say, 'I washed my feet at home before I came.' "Does he believe we should adopt this practice? No, *but he* is *not a literalist!*, he points out. He sees this as Jesus' way of showing us how to love one another.

This year's lectureship at Freed-Hardeman College was on fellowship. Speakers included Gus Nichols, Tom Warren, Roy Deaver, G. K. Wallace, etc. It has been published in book form, with all the questions of fellowship dealt with. Unlike the lectureship at Abilene, which discussed this question at the Third Annual Preachers Workshop, there was no one on the program to represent *the other side*, which was the position, we may presume, called into judgment, one subject being "A New Unity Movement." Good old FHC must be commended for guarding the faith!

Edward Fudge, Gordon Wilson, and Ferrell Jenkins, brethren generally associated with the *Gospel Guardian* and our "non-cooperative - conservative" churches, recently attended the program of the Evangelical Theological Society at Wheaton College, where they

moved in the company of some of the world's renowned evangelical scholars, including F. F. Bruce, Merrill Tenney, and George Eldon Ladd. The men interviewed F. F. Bruce, a report of which has appeared in the *Gospel Guardian.* These three, we take it, were the only Church of Christ folk represented at the conference, but there is nothing in their report that they presumed themselves to be the only Christians there.

The First Annual Mid-Gulf Coast Unity Meeting is planned for March 29-30 at the Proctor Street Church of Christ in Port Arthur. Participants include Ray Chester, Paul Young, Vic Hunter, Jim Reynolds, and Leroy Garrett. Housing and food will be provided by the congregation. Contact Richard Hall for further information at 335 Mockingbird Lane, Port Arthur, Texas 77640.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

Christianity has so many wonderful paradoxes, and one is rejoicing in suffering. I'm glad, and yet deeply saddened that you, and so many others must suffer at the hands of small men and fearful brothers. I have just read your account of your weekend of trouble in Mississippi, and feel that I must write to give you love and encouragement in the name of the Lord. I pray for you and your ministry, and especially for those you minister to. Please pass our love on to to two families in Mississippi.—*Martha Davis, 3650 Oak Springs, Austin, Tx. 78721.*

I read with deep sadness the account of the Mississippi brothers' treat-ment of you and the two professors and their wives. It is hard to conceive of such unchristian rudeness—in the church of all places.—*Vernon D. Parrott, 426 Live Oak Lane, Weatherford, Tx. 76086.*

After reading it over through a hamburger last night and giving out all the groans from within, and finally ending up choking back tears and sobs, my prayers go up to my Lord and Savior to give those professors and you all the strength you need, and that His Spirit might guide you. Where does it place us when a dumb animal has more compassion for his master than we have for our Master? How many of us would take a towel and wipe the tears of pain from the Master's face, much less snuggle up and lick the tears away? That just got the best of me, a poodle's love.—*reader in New Mexico.*

Your article on "The Professor and His Poodle" really touched a sensitive nerve with me. The judgmental attitude of so many of our brethren on so many issues is a source of real heart-break with me. Somehow Christian love must conquer this worldly spirit!—*Charles R. Boatman, St. Louis Christian College. Florissant, Missouri 63033.*

Your article "The Professor and His Poodle" brought anguish to my heart. I do appreciate the fact, however, that you are able to participate in such experiences and hopefully create a little bit of constructive thoughtfulness in some hearts where it is needed. Let's exchange prayers that both of us may be so used.—*W. F. Lawn, president, Manhattan Christian College, Manhattan, Ks. 66502.*

Your article made my heart bleed. What does our Lord in heaven say when He sees such lovelessness among those who claim to be His followers! We talk a lot about what the church needs, but from this man's corner our greatest need is to learn to love one another more. If doctrine is right but the heart wrong, what good does right doctrine do?—*Antoine Valdetero, Box 308, Jennings, La. 70546.*

The Holy Spirit is working in this congregation in unbelievable ways. Love is beyond comprehension. This is truly one congregation where each part has found its place and is knit together as a body and is functioning as such. We have a great hospital ministry going as well as a benevolent work. The Lord is blessing us beyond measure.—*Hank Allan, Church of Christ, 909 Laurent Ave., Caruthersville, Mo. 63830.*

(This is one of the "free churches" that I wrote about in our November issue.—*Ed.*)

I grew up in San Angelo, Texas where across the street lived some Minnesota Catholics. After returning to California a friend took us to a prayer and share meeting on Friday nite. Most of those people there reading the Bible, quoting it, and praying were Catholics. What a shock! I've even learned since then that some Episcopalians believe the Book. I've learned that many fine Christians among the Presbyterians are struggling with the question of baptism.—*Sam and Judy Lee, 1006 Old Dutch Mill Rd., Colorado Springs, Co. 80907.*

Thanks for the challenge that is always there in each issue. How our people need to think! Elton Trueblood's book *The Validity of the Christian Mission* deserves a plug, I believe.—*George A Trueblood, Louisville Bible College.*

There will be a Spiritual Life Conference conducted by Wes Reagan and Roy Osborne, March 4-6, at the Irving (Texas) Ramada Inn. The sessions are from 7-10 p.m. with a different topic each evening. The cost is 25.00 per person. Write me for more information. —*Sandra Lawrence, 3805 Calgary Ct., Irving, Tx. 75062, phone 214-255-7473.*

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